

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ERDA-05 CIAE-00 H-02 INR-07 IO-10 L-03 NSAE-00

OIC-02 OMB-01 PA-01 PM-04 PRS-01 SAJ-01 SAM-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 DODE-00 NSC-05 ACDA-05 ISO-00

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R 291515Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8228

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

C/AMEMBASSY LONDON 6031

AMCONSUL MUNICH

USMISSION USNATO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

USDEL MBFR VIENNA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

CINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 18472

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PARM, NATO, UR

SUBJ: PRAVDA AGAIN COMMENTS --GUARDEDLY--ON OPTION III

REF: A. MOSCOW 18209; B. MOSCOW 18412

1. SUMMARY. PRAVDA ON DEC 29 AGAIN DOWNPLAYS, BUT

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DOES NOT CONDEMN, OPTION III. IT ADDS NOTHING, HOWEVER,

TO THE DEC 19 COMMENTARY (REF A), WHICH IS EVIDENTLY TO BE THE SOVIET PUBLIC POSITION ON THE PROPOSAL FOR THE TIME BEING. THE GENERAL TONE OF THE COMMENTARY IS POSITIVE, CALLING AN AGREEMENT IN MBFR "BOTH NECESSARY AND POSSIBLE". END SUMMARY.

2. THE COMMENTARY (WRITTEN BY PRAVDA'S VIENNA CORRESPONDENT MEL'NIKOV) BOTH BEGINS AND ENDS ON POSITIVE NOTES; AT THE OUTSET MEL'NIKOV ARGUES THAT "THE VIENNA NEGOTIATIONS REST AS NEVER BEFORE ON A FIRM FOUNDATION"--I.E., CSCE, WHICH REFLECTS THE INTERESTS OF ALL PARTICIPANT STATES IN MILITARY DETENTE. AND IN HIS CONCLUDING COMMENT, HE CLAIMS THAT "THE ACHIEVEMENT OF POSITIVE RESULTS IN VIENNA IS BOTH NECESSARY AND POSSIBLE. THE PEOPLES OF EUROPE ARE WAITING FOR MEASURES TO BE TAKEN VERY SOON IN THE AREA OF MILITARY DETENTE..."

3. BETWEEN THESE COMMENTS HE IS SOMEWHAT LESS POSITIVE, THOUGH HE REMAINS LARGELY NON-POLEMICAL. HE CONTENTS THAT THE PREPARATORY CONSULTATIONS ESTABLISHED CERTAIN PRINCIPLES WHICH MUST BE OBSERVED, ENUMERATING AMONG THEM: (1) CONCRETE OBLIGATIONS MUST BE ASSUMED "AT THE VERY BEGINNING" BY ALL DIRECT PARTICIPANTS; (2) THE EXISTING BALANCE OF FORCES "SHOULD NOT BE CHANGED" (NE SLEDUYET IZMENYAT); AND (3) "PRACTICAL MEASURES RELATING TO REDUCTIONS MUST INCLUDE GROUND FORCES, AIR FORCES, AND ALSO ARMAMENTS, INCLUDING NUCLEAR WEAPONS."

4. AFTER TOUTING THE PROPOSALS MADE BY THE EAST TO MOVE NEGOTIATIONS FORWARD SINCE 1973--"BY NO MEANS 'PROPAGANDISTIC STEPS'"--MEL'NIKOV CRITICIZES THE WEST FOR CONTINUING ITS INSISTENCE ON ASYMMETRIC "OR, SPEAKING MORE SIMPLY, UNEQUAL" REDUCTIONS, AND FOR CANADIAN AND WEST EUROPEAN REFUSAL TO TAKE UPON THEMSELVES CONCRETE REDUCTION OBLIGATIONS. HE FURTHER CALLS THE COMMON CEILING PROPOSAL A "LEGAL OPPORTUNITY" FOR SOME STATES TO EXPAND THEIR MILITARY POWER BECAUSE SOME STATES WOULD REDUCE FORCES WHILE

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OTHERS WOULD INCREASE THEIRS.

5. MEL'NIKOV TREADS CAUTIOUSLY ON OPTION III, REPLAYING THE KHLESTOV/LAHODA AND PRAVDA DEC 19 LINE (REF A) WHICH DOWNPLAYS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPOSAL, BUT SHIES AWAY FROM OUTRIGHT CONDEMNATION. TO LARGE DEGREE MEL'NIKOV USES EXACTLY SAME PHRASING AS IN PRAVDA DEC 19 COMMENTARY, BLENDING IT ON OCCASION WITH THE

STATEMENTS ATTRIBUTED BY TASS TO CZECH MBFR SPOKESMAN LAHODA IN HIS STATEMENT TO THE PRESS. MEL'NIKOV ADDS ONLY A MORE EXPLICIT RENDERING OF THE CRITICISM THAT ONLY THE U.S. IS UNDERTAKING OBLIGATIONS TO REDUCE NUCLEAR WEAPONS, NOT THE OTHER NATO DIRECT PARTICIPANTS. HE CONCLUDES THAT BECAUSE OF THIS FAULT "THE MEASURE PROPOSED BY THE WEST CANNOT SERVE AS AN OBSTACLE TO AN INCREASE IN NUCLEAR WEAPONS". MEL'NIKOV SUMMARIZES HIS ARGUMENT IN A PARAPGRAPH LIFTED IN ITS ENTIRETY FROM THE DEC 19 TASS ITEM: "IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE REAL PROGRESS...THE WESTERN SIDE MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE WELL-FOUNDED PROPOSALS OF THE SOCIALIST STATES AND CEASE ITS UNREALISTIC DEMANDS".

6. COMMENT. THE MEL'NIKOV ARTICLE ADDS NOTHING NEW, BUT SERVES AS FURTHER CONFIRMATION THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE ESTABLISHED THEIR PUBLIC LINE ON OPTION III FOR THE TIME BEING IN THE DEC 19 TASS ARTICLE (AND IN LAHODA'S REMARKS TO THE PRESS CONFERENCE). AS OUR CONVERSATION DEC 24 IN MFA INDICATED (REF B), THE SOVIETS ARE PROBABLY STILL IN THE PROCESS OF COMING UP WITH A DETAILED RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSAL, AND A CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC LINE IS UNLIKELY UNTIL THE RESPONSE IS READY.  
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